

A

# LECTURE

DELIVERED IN THE

**ANATOMICAL THEATRE,**

PETER-STREET,

CONCLUDING

THE SESSION, 1825.

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By JOHN KIRBY,

ONE OF THE LECTURERS AT THE INSTITUTION, &c.

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1825.



DEDICATED TO  
THE STUDENTS  
ATTENDING THE  
COURSE OF LECTURES  
ON  
ANATOMY AND SURGERY,  
AT THE  
THEATRE OF ANATOMY, PETER-STREET, DUBLIN.  
BY  
THEIR OBEDIENT SERVANT,  
AND SINCERE FRIEND,

JOHN KIRBY.

*Harcourt-street,  
May 2, 1825.*



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# LECTURE,

§c. §c.

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GENTLEMEN,

BEFORE we close the labours of the present session, I beg leave to address you in my character of the first founder in Ireland of a private Institution for the promotion of Anatomical and Surgical Science, and as one of the conductors of an establishment for the instruction of those who intend to profess the art of surgery. It is now a matter of comparatively little importance to enlarge on the inducements which led me to an undertaking of so great a magnitude,—one which, at its origin, not only excited surprise in the members of

our profession, but even awakened doubts of the sanity of the individual whose money, whose health, whose labour, and whose time were to be expended, to secure its permanency, and to render certain its efficiency.

At a period when the schools of Surgical Education had not yet come into vigorous action, or were rather languishing in apathy, and our youth were obliged to seek professional instruction in foreign countries, it did not require much observation to perceive the causes which retarded the advancement of surgical science in Ireland, depriving us for such a long period of years of that character as surgeons, which we now begin to enjoy, and which our neighbours, with minds hitherto shackled with an illiberality unbecoming the enlightened professors of a useful and dignified science, are at length disposed to confess we begin to merit. Although the discovery of the cause of Ireland's retardation in this particular was not a matter of much difficulty, still it was far from easy to prevent the continuance of its operation, or to find a remedy

for the consequences it had already entailed, and which were now too obviously rooted with an almost incurable inveteracy.

The fame of the foreign universities and schools of anatomical and surgical education, so deservedly and widely extended, it was easy to perceive would exert a powerful interference against the humble efforts of an infant Institution at home. This was a natural opposition; one whose influence was readily foreseen, and which could not be combated or overcome except by time, unremitting industry, and powerful exertion. Although these circumstances were calculated to discourage those, who sowing late, expect an early harvest, and who have no reliance on their own perseverance; on my mind, long reconciled to labour and fatigue, they produced but an inconsiderable degree of impression. Far from sinking under these discouraging disadvantages, they supplied me with increasing energies, while I felt myself supported by the inspiring hope, that I should live to enjoy the good which lay remotely within my prospect; and

that, before I died, I might have the gratifying acknowledgments of men who saw my labours, who witnessed my anxieties, who were partakers in my fatigues, and who could value my exertions. In these particulars my wishes have been fulfilled, and my ambition satisfied. I have seen the day, when in this our country surgical science was oppressed with lethargy; when the professors of our art, bewildered with hopelessness, and overcome with despair, stood by the bed-side in which it lay palsied, and sinking in obscurity. If this was a painful sight to one who loves his profession, and is devoted in attachment to his country, an ample recompense has been received from the manifestation of that spirit, which has been quickened into action, whose increasing influence is yearly experienced, whose power, diffused through this kingdom, will yet be the subject of general acknowledgment, and of foreign admiration; and by which, if carefully nurtured and properly directed, Ireland may one day rival the medical reputation of her neighbours, and may far exceed that of the continental schools. These may be visionary hopes,



and unreal views of national glory ; yet, they are not to be relinquished. They have been, in a great measure, the source of the incitement, which the present period experiences. In minds equally warm with that which first felt, and now acknowledges their animating influence, they may continue to awaken new feelings of ambition, and to discover new sources, from which our surgical character may hereafter receive considerable accessions to its respectability.

The natural obstacles offered by the celebrated schools of surgical science to the feeble competition of an infant establishment, raised by an individual who had little to recommend him but his zeal—who had no patron but his own industry—and in a country too, where every scheme was accustomed to wither in neglect, and meritorious efforts to be consumed without reward ;—these constituted impediments of a formidable magnitude. However, it was to be anticipated, that these would give way before the irresistible force of perseverance.

Great as were these difficulties from without, they were but grains of opposition, compared to the gigantic barriers, which by unnatural hands, guided by the impulse of unnatural dispositions, were reared at home against the progress of a new institution. But these have also given way, and this Institution, proud at the difficulties it has surmounted, triumphantly feels, not only that it has survived the illiberal attacks of combining interests, and undermining calumny, but likewise, established the important certainty for other institutions with similar objects, that, whatever may be the embarrassments of their birth, or the disadvantage of their infancy, they will be ultimately surmounted by patient exertions, and a proper exercise of liberal feeling.

At a time, when the opposition which aimed at the destruction of this institution, has ceased to exist, or fears to proclaim the shameful publicity which its cunning was not sufficient to conceal, these observations may appear uncalled for, and may seem to possess an invi-

dious tendency. That I am actuated by any motive inconsistent with the principles which hitherto regulated my conduct, or derogatory to the character in which I address you, I must be permitted to disavow.—Gentlemen, I would blush, was I obliged to confess to my own heart, that I retain an uncharitable recollection of the efforts which were made, and the schemes which were devised, to crush an individual who sought professional advancement by no other means than an honourable exercise of his industry, and to ruin an establishment that promised to be useful; one, from which, without the apprehension of a sustainable contradiction, I may assert so many solid benefits have already emanated to this country. Reasons, widely different from those, in which these observations may be supposed to originate, have induced me to dwell, for the last time, upon a subject, now capable of exciting no other sensation in my mind than one of regret. It is painful, indeed, to think that there should exist any persons, who professing themselves labourers in the fields of science, from selfish

views, endeavour to render abortive the efforts of those who may be engaged in the same pursuits. Were you, gentlemen, aware how far the progress of surgical science has been interrupted in this kingdom by a narrow spirit of monopoly, which ever affords resistance to every attempt at improvement, you would, with me lament, that it ever had its fatal existence ; you would feel indignant at such principles. Were these principles no longer operative, indignation might subside, and lamentation cease. It is melancholy, however, to be obliged to confess, that this spirit of opposition is still abroad. Withdrawn from an establishment, which withstood the unavailing torrent directed against its interests, it has changed its objects, and seems to have transferred its efforts at destruction against the new and numerous institutions which begin to erect themselves within our city :—Institutions of which we should feel proud,—by which our poor cannot fail to be benefited,—by which talent will be cherished, and from which the Irish surgical character must derive a

reputation creditable to its industry, its objects, its zeal, and humanity.

Was I not to seize this public opportunity of condemning a disposition so hostile to professional advancement—so disgraceful to the individuals in whose bosoms it is nurtured—so derogatory to, and inconsistent with our declarations of liberality, I would apprehend it might be imagined I had enrolled myself amongst those, who jealous of the success of others, or envious of their prosperity, unite to overwhelm every individual and every establishment which holds out the promise of private good, even though the interests of society, and the character of Irish surgery were to be buried in the ruins they had made. I desire, publicly, to disclaim their sentiments. They are not, in any part, such as I entertain.—Mine are the sincerest hopes, that institutions, calculated to promote surgical science in this country may annually increase. That their founders may receive the rewards which always await on persevering, industrious talent.—That you, in your turn, may derive from them an incitement to similar under-



takings, and that society, hereafter, with gratitude to her benefactors, may, in acknowledgments to you, repay those whose example you have thought it praise-worthy to imitate.

When a foul opposition and deep conspiracy sought to overturn the Institution from which I now address you, silence was necessarily imposed on me. My own voice, the only advocate I could employ, would be suspected of pleading the cause of my own interests. Whatever defence I might have made—whatever arguments I might have adduced to expose the designs of my opponents, alloyed by the imputation of selfishness, with which they might be charged, would have been heard without attention, and urged without effect. Time, from whose search no motives of human actions are concealed, was the source of my reliance. To its unerring tribunal I fearlessly appealed.—Things, however, are now opposite.—The silence I was obliged to observe, when my own interests were concerned, and my heart

so deeply engaged, cannot be necessary, when my design is, not to defend myself against attacks upon this Institution, but to fortify your breasts against impressions unfavourable to the establishment—to generate in your minds a disregard for those sneers, which the face of illiberality and selfishness wears, and to excite a disbelief in the sincerity of that advice, which, professing to guide you to the true source of professional attainment, influences you to confine your opportunities to such as are afforded by a particular Institution, or to undervalue the advantages likely to accrue from an attendance at other places of anatomical and surgical education. Although I consider these cautions necessary at present, I am free to acknowledge they are less so than they were formerly. The senior students begin to think for themselves. They begin to look for instruction at every fountain which promises to produce it. The more elementary students will soon be influenced by their example. It may therefore be hoped, that before the expiration of many seasons this despotic authority will no longer

exist, which, actuated by feelings to be banished from the breasts of men, dignifying themselves with the appellation of Philosophers, exercised an undue power over the minds of our surgical youth—taught them an unnatural slavery—circumscribed the means by which they could emerge from ignorance, and attain those high acquirements which are never to be procured while the opportunities of knowledge are diminished, and the reason kept subject to any other dominion, than that under which it is placed by the unbiassed exercise of its own operations.

In the prospectus originally published of the plan of education pursued in this Establishment, I proposed to remedy the defects of former systems of instruction in this country. How far the plan I devised, and the methods here pursued, are calculated to promote the ends I had in view, confiding in their favorable testimony, I appeal to the reputation with which the name of this school is extended abroad, and to that concourse of pupils who



received their education here. It is pleasing to reflect they retain with gratitude the recollection of that light, which from this place was shed upon their path, and conducted them to independence and respectability.

The claims which this Institution presumed to entertain from the liberal principles in which it was founded, and the importance of its object, it still continues to feel, augmented by the consciousness that it has never aimed at any thing more sincerely than the fulfilment of its promises, and the interests of its pupils; and by a determination, with which nothing can interfere, to be more abundantly useful in succeeding seasons than in any of those which have hitherto passed by. With these dispositions, the accommodation it possesses, and the choice collection of preparations which constitutes our Museum, I do not hesitate to express my confidence, that this Institution will secure the advancement of its pupils, and attach them to its interests, when with judgments more matured, they reflect on its exertions, and can form a proper estimate of the

advantages enjoyed from its opportunities. To assist you in appreciating them hereafter, and to prevent those uneasy feelings of disappointment which originate in inconsiderateness, and a want of acquaintance with the difficulties which surround a lecturer in our science, I am induced to enlarge somewhat on the meaning which we intend to convey, when it is said, we propose to deliver a course of lectures on anatomy and surgery.

By the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland a course of lectures has been defined at six months. This circumstance argues a conviction, that within a period more limited, it is impossible to comprise the number of subjects which require to be treated of in consequence of their importance. While this body has marked the limits of their course, custom has fixed, at an hour daily, the period to be allotted to the delivery of a lecture. Controlled in point of time, the lecturer is left altogether at liberty in other particulars. He may pursue any method which he pleases to adopt; he may select from the objects of our

science such as are most entertaining to the mind, or such as he esteems most essential to the purpose of improvement. The subjects of his choice may be few, may be handled comprehensively, and at a length proportioned to their importance: or they may be as numerous as the subjects of the science, and may be severally touched so lightly, that the view is circumscribed by narrow bounds, within which so many objects are crowded, that the impression which each makes must be unavoidably superficial, and that of all necessarily confined. To us it has always appeared of much more consequence to make a proper selection from the variety which our science embraces, and to treat it with that perfect attention which it deserves, rather than to compress into a period, though long, still too brief for the accomplishment of all that is to be done by a teacher ardent in the cause in which he is engaged, the topics which an anatomical syllabus comprises, or the catalogue of the nosologist unfolds before our view. According to my idea of the perfection of a course of lectures, it depends more on the propriety of the se-

lection of materials, the purity of the ingredients, and the skill with which they are combined, than on either its duration, or the multiplication of their numbers, and the consequent rapidity of the process with which they are worked up into use. Influenced by this opinion, it has been hitherto our principal aim that the course of lectures delivered in this theatre shall be distinguished for the suitable copiousness with which the subjects under consideration are treated, rather than for the number of those topics which might be introduced, without the possibility of communicating instruction. To those who form a different estimate from mine of that in which the excellence of a course of lectures consists, the plan pursued here will in all probability appear defective, and with such the omissions connected with my scheme may be construed into evidence of carelessness, or may even be imagined to proceed from a disregard of the covenant which a lecturer enters into with his audience, when he proposes to direct them in the pursuits of science. These are not ideal apprehensions. They have been realized in

every establishment similar to this; and I am full well aware, that the courses delivered here have been sometimes thought deficient, because they did not comprehend every matter appertaining to anatomy and the theory and practice of surgery.

At the conclusion of a course I have heard it sometimes remarked, we had omitted certain subjects, and that their omissions constituted no inconsiderable imperfection. It had been forgotten, however, how much time had been consumed, and what labour had been expended upon subjects of more moment than those we had neglected, and less immediately concerned the nearest interests of surgery. What had not been touched upon in the surgical division of the course, it should be recollected, was treated of in the anatomical, when it appeared intimately connected with the parts under review, or seemed calculated to awaken your interest for details which, had it not been for these enlivening and necessary digressions, would have been listened to with apathy and fatigue. It is true, we have some-

times neglected to make the milder forms of whitlow and chilblain the subject of lengthened discourses. But we have done so, with the intention of devoting weeks to fractures, luxations, herniæ, the diseases of the urinary organs, &c. &c. subjects which may be dismissed in a very few lectures, by those who desire no more than to have the power of saying they left no surgical disease unspoken of. It is my desire, that this explanation should not be received as an apology or atonement to those, who have already conferred on us the honour of their attendance. To these Gentlemen I have already made my acknowledgments, and expressed my regret that circumstances did not permit us to be as abundantly useful in our office as the sincerity of our wishes for their advancement would lead us to be. My design is, rather to vindicate our determination to persevere in a plan suggested by reflection, and proved by experience to be better calculated than any other that could be devised to secure the important ends, for the attainment of which young



men assemble here. I also wish, by this public notification of our intention, to provide against those observations which disappointment might hereafter suggest, were any of those who hear me at present uninformed in these particulars, to enter on an attendance upon the ensuing course of lectures.

Various motives influence different people at the several periods of life. When I first undertook the arduous task of teaching the science of anatomy, and I embarked in this establishment a sum too considerable to be risked by a person of a more calculating and less ambitious mind than mine, I feel no difficulty in declaring, that many of my hopes terminated in the advancement of my means, while others led to the gratification to be obtained from the anticipation of acknowledgments I should yet receive for my exertions in a country, whose name was not mentioned amongst the schools of surgical science. No hope, which inspired the undertaking, or contributed to defeat the op-

position which oppressed it, I thank Heaven, remains to be realized. My means have improved equal to my most sanguine expectations; and this Institution has earned for its founder all the professional advancement he enjoys. But the time when I derived emolument from this Establishment no longer exists. There is a period, too, beyond which the character of a lecturer, who is also a practitioner, ceases to be benefited by his labours as a teacher.—Why I should continue these labours, when I cannot promise myself any accruing advantage, is a question which has been frequently urged. The same circumstances which suggested this question to my friends, seems to have induced many to conclude, that each course of lectures would be the last I would deliver. This impression, for some seasons past, I have had an annual occasion to remove. It is my desire to do it away at present, and to prevent the recurrence of it in future, by thus publicly declaring my intention to preserve the relation in which I now stand to this Establishment, as long as I feel I am capable of being of service



to the students of our profession, while Providence is pleased to give me health, and I can enjoy the consciousness of the pleasure which arises from being disinterestedly useful.

I should be extremely sorry were it understood to be the intention of any of these observations, to exalt the reputation of this establishment by undervaluing the merits of the other schools for surgical education. No one can appreciate more thoroughly than I do the opportunities they all afford, and the advantages they offer to those who are sufficiently industrious to attend them. Neither is it my object to detract from the merits of the individuals who preside over these institutions. I know their talents, I have witnessed their zeal, and I feel assured, that in committing your education to their direction, you repose on a vigilant anxiety for your interests. No, Gentlemen, my purpose is none other than to inform you in what difficulties this Institution was founded, to set you to inquire concerning the benefits its labours have diffused—to give you an earnest of what you may expect from the future advantages it holds forth to you, by

a reference to what it has already accomplished—by the promise that what it has realised to others, and to you, it shall realize to those who succeed you: and that the person who now addresses you never will be less zealous for their improvement, less vigilant over their studies, or less anxious where his pupils are concerned, than any of those persons who are engaged in the same pursuits, and devoted to the same labours.

While I advocate the cause of the offspring of these hands, and the child of my own industry, I would not be understood to desire to seduce a single pupil from that course which he may have been recommended to pursue, or his views of his own welfare may direct him to adopt. Nor should I ever wish to enter a name in the class book of this theatre, which is not enrolled in consequence of the public repute of the establishment, and an unqualified reliance, that it will discharge its duties to the utmost that is permitted by interruptions inseparable from anatomical and surgical pursuits, and by the occasional distrac-

tions, which professional avocations unavoidably create.

And now, Gentlemen, allow me to return you my best thanks for the polite attention you have shewn me; and in taking my leave of you, to assure you, that you have the warmest wishes of my heart for your happiness and prosperity.

J. KIRBY.

